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# BUSM News & Notes: October 1984

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*Boston University*

# News & Notes

Boston University School of Medicine



October 1984  
Issue #80

## "HEALTH NET" PROGRAM LAUNCHED AT NEIGHBORHOOD HEALTH CENTERS

Boston Mayor Raymond L. Flynn, University President John R. Silber and Dean Sandson were among those participating in the formal launching of "Health NET," a pilot project of continuing education television programming to the 12 Boston neighborhood health centers. The Sept. 21 event took place in a "teleclassroom" (studio) of the University's main campus Instructional Media Services Center and was transmitted via cable hookups to the health centers.

The Boston Area Health Education Center conceived and implemented the "Health NET" program in collaboration with public and private institutions in Boston. The one-hour weekly programs allow the centers' health professionals to obtain the latest expert information on the diagnosis and treatment of diseases without taking time away from their duties. Because the programs are "interactive" (members of the professional audience can speak directly to a lecturer via a cordless telephone hookup), questions can be answered immediately and discussion can take place.

At the Sept. 21 event, John McCahan, M.D., associate dean of BUSM and acting director of AHEC, introduced the program. Flynn, Silber and Sandson were part of a panel that discussed "Health NET." Other panel members were Linda Shyavitz, external affairs administrator at University Hospital; Art Thompson, general manager of Cablevision of Boston; and Hubert Jessup, general manager of Boston Community Access and Programming Foundation. Representatives of the news media viewed the discussion from the Roxbury Comprehensive Health Center and questioned panel members about the program via the telephone hookup.

A major grant from the Jessie B. Cox Charitable Trust provided funds for production, studio and broadcast costs for "Health NET." The television presentations, given primarily by BUSM faculty, are broadcast over the Public Institutional Network (PIN) of the Boston Community Access and Programming Foundation, which is using the project to demonstrate how nonprofit and public institutions may use the network.

## RECEPTION MARKS ALCOHOL PROGRAM ANNIVERSARY, BOOK PUBLICATION

About 75 colleagues, friends and family members attended a September reception marking the tenth anniversary of the BUSM Fetal Alcohol Education Program and the publication of a book by two Program



directors. The event was held in the Wilkins Board Room at UH.

Written by Henry L. Rosett, M.D., and Lyn Weiner, M.P.H., "Alcohol and the Fetus: A Clinical Perspective" was published by Oxford University Press. The book draws on the authors' experiences in the prenatal clinic at Boston City Hospital and recommends strategies for health-care workers to identify and treat pregnant women who also are problem drinkers. The book contains a comprehensive review of related literature and attempts to answer such questions as how alcohol affects a fetus and what the role of the primary-care physician should be. Research results covered in the book include findings that heavy drinkers who stop consuming alcohol, even in mid-pregnancy, are still in a position to protect the developing fetus.

The Distilled Spirits Council of the United States, the National Institute for Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism and the Licensed Beverage Information Council have funded much of the research reported on in this book.

Rosett, an associate professor of obstetrics and gynecology, and Weiner, an assistant professor of psychiatry (public health), conceived and developed the Fetal Alcohol Education Program as a clearinghouse of information on alcohol abuse and fetal health. The Program currently is operating under a grant from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to provide training to health-care and social-service agencies dealing with pregnant problem drinkers.

MATERNAL SCREENING EFFECTIVE IN DETECTING NEURAL TUBE DEFECTS Screening women with seemingly normal pregnancies for high concentrations of alpha-fetoprotein (MSAFP) in their blood is effective in prenatal detection of neural tube defects (NTDs) such as spina bifida, according to a study in the Sept. 21 issue of the Journal of the American Medical Association. The test also is an indicator of other potential congenital defects, low birth weight, and fetal or neonatal death.

In the report, BUSM professor Aubrey Milunsky, M.B.B.Ch., D.Sc., and co-investigator Elliot Alpert, M.D., of the Baylor College of Medicine, Houston, emphasized that MSAFP testing should be a routine option for all pregnant women, and would be performed at 16 to 18 weeks' gestation. Based on the results of the initial test of blood serum MSAFP level, a second blood serum test or ultrasound may be ordered. When determined to be necessary, amniocentesis to test for amniotic fluid AFP concentration would be requested. This testing should be conducted as part of a carefully monitored interdisciplinary program involving the obstetrician, laboratory staff, clinical geneticist, ultrasonographer and program coordinator, according to the researchers.

Using radioimmunoassay measures of alpha-fetoprotein, 21,000 nondiabetic and 442 diabetic women with seemingly normal pregnancies were tested. (The two groups were separated because diabetic women normally have a lower level of alpha-fetoprotein in their system.) The researchers concluded that MSAFP screening should be offered as part of the medical care of women with diabetes mellitus, despite regular use of ultrasound. The women were patients of a private, suburban obstetrical practice. Of the 21,000 nondiabetic women tested, 249 (1.2 percent) had elevated MSAFP levels. Based on these results, 53 of those women underwent recommended amniocentesis, of which 14 (26.4 percent) carried a fetus with a NTD or major congenital defect. Ten of the 442



diabetic patients (2.3 percent) showed elevated MSAFP levels, of which four carried a fetus with an open NTD.

Milunsky, a professor of pediatrics and obstetrics and gynecology, and director of the Section for Human Genetics, recently was awarded a grant to study neural tube defects (NTDs) and other congenital defects. See story below.

MAJOR GRANT AWARDED TO MILUNSKY  
TO STUDY CONGENITAL DEFECTS

Aubrey Milunsky, M.B.B.Ch., D.Sc., will study "Epidemiology of Neural Tube and Other Congenital Defects" with a \$1,445,773 grant awarded by the Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service. This study of 25,700 pregnancies will focus on neural tube and other congenital defects, specifically seeking associations between such defects and periconceptional vitamin A and folic acid consumption, hyperthermia, antecedent spontaneous abortion, spermicides and other environmental/genetic factors.

Milunsky will work with co-investigators: Herschel Jick, M.D., an associate professor of medicine and director of the Boston Collaborative Drug Surveillance Program; Kenneth J. Rothman, Dr.P.H., and Walter C. Willett, M.D., both associate professors of epidemiology, Harvard School of Public Health; and J. Steven Morris, Ph.D., a senior research scientist at the University of Missouri Research Reactor Facility.

BUMC OBTAINS CITY'S TOW LOT  
TO REPLACE LOT A PARKING AREA

Medical Center officials recently reached an agreement with the City of Boston to use a large portion of the city's Tow-and-Hold Facility on Albany Street for employee and visitor parking. This lot will replace the current Lot A, which will be closed in a few weeks to make way for construction of the new University Hospital Partial Replacement Project.

The approximately 2 1/4-acre Boston Tow Lot space, which upon opening to the Medical Center will be designated Lot A, is on the south side of Albany Street. According to Dean Sandson, the aquisition of the Tow Lot space will more than compensate for the lost spaces in the current A-Lot.

DEAN SANDSON NAMED PRESIDENT  
OF MEDICAL RESEARCH SOCIETY

Dean Sandson has been named president of the Massachusetts Society for Medical Research. With representatives from the Commonwealth's four medical schools, the society, begun in the 1950s, plays a major role in medical research in Massachusetts. Dean Sandson, who was vice president of the organization for the past two years, replaced former president A. Clifford Barger, M.D., the Robert Henry Pfeiffer Professor of Physiology at Harvard Medical School.

Dean Sandson also recently presented two awards at the Lupus Foundation of America, Massachusetts Chapter, tenth anniversary tribute dinner. He presented an award to a former student of his at Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York, Peter Schur, M.D., now of Harvard Medical School. The Dean also presented an award to Henrietta Aladjem, on behalf of James Howell, Ph.D., the first president of the Foundation, at the Sept. 15 event, held at the Hyatt Regency Hotel, Cambridge, Mass.



1984 STERLING DRUG PROFESSOR  
TO SPEAK ON DRUGS AND THE AGED

David J. Greenblatt, M.D., will deliver an address on "Drugs and the Aged" on Nov. 1 as the 1984 BUSM Sterling Visiting Professor.

The address will be held at 4 p.m. in Room L-110. Greenblatt is chief of the Division of Clinical Pharmacology at Tufts-New England Medical Center and a professor of psychiatry and associate professor of medicine at Tufts University School of Medicine. During his visit, Greenblatt also will participate in the research and teaching activities of the Departments of Pharmacology and Experimental Therapeutics, Psychiatry, Medicine and Anesthesiology.

MARKEY TRUST GRANTING SCHOLAR  
AWARDS IN BIOMEDICAL RESEARCH

Dean Sandson announced at the September Faculty Meeting that the Lucille P. Markey Charitable Trust has established a program of

Scholar Awards in Biomedical Science. The first series of awards will be given for the academic year beginning on or after July 1, 1985. Four applications from BUSM will be selected to be sent to the national selection committee that will make the awards.

The awards are being given "to enhance the scientific development and productivity of outstanding men and women planning careers in biomedical research." Awards will provide both a stipend/salary and support for the awardees' research.

A maximum of 16 annual awards will be made: up to eight to faculty members who hold a Ph.D. degree in one of the biomedical sciences and who have completed two or three years of postdoctoral training; and up to eight individuals who hold the M.D./Ph.D. or M.D. degrees, who may or may not have begun postdoctoral study. For more information, researchers should contact their department chairmen.

PROFESSORS PARTICIPATE IN 'WHAT  
ABOUT THE CHILDREN?' CONFERENCE

Issues and questions raised by current developments in reproductive and prenatal medicine, and in particular, those relating

to the children born as a result of these advances, will be discussed in an Oct. 29 to 30 conference at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Cambridge, Mass.

Two BUSM faculty members will participate in the event, entitled "What About the Children?: An International Conference on the Legal, Social and Ethical Implications of New Reproductive and Prenatal Technologies." Aubrey Milunsky, M.B.B.Ch., D.Sc., a professor of pediatrics and obstetrics and gynecology, and director of the Section for Human Genetics at BUSM, will moderate a session on "Prenatal Screening and Diagnosis." George J. Annas, J.D., M.P.H., the Edward Utley Professor of Health Law and chief of the Health Law Section at the School of Public Health, will moderate sessions on "Social Policy Implications of Noncoital Reproduction" and "Protecting the Interests of the Child." The conference is being sponsored by the American Society of Law & Medicine.

CANCER RESEARCH ASSOCIATION  
LECTURE TO BE HELD IN NOVEMBER

"Psychological Factors in Cancer" is the topic of the second in a series of lectures sponsored annually by the Boston Cancer

Research Association, a group of clinical and basic researchers from the



Boston scientific community. To be held Nov. 13 at the Countway Library of Medicine in Boston, the lecture will feature Bernard Fox, Ph.D., a BUSM professor of psychiatry (biobehavioral sciences).

The Association's first lecture in this year's series was entitled "Environmental Carcinogenesis." Among the speakers at the Oct. 2 lecture were Marianne N. Prout, M.D., an assistant professor of medicine and public health (epidemiology and biostatistics), who spoke on "Diagnostic and Clinical Limitations"; and John Groopman, Ph.D., an assistant professor of public health (environmental health) and microbiology, who spoke on "Summary, Conclusions and Future Directions."

The BUSM Department of Continuing Medical Education grants Category 1 credit towards the Physician's Recognition Award of the American Medical Association for the lectures. For more information about the lecture series, contact Herbert Kupchik, Ph.D., at x5961 (247-5961).

OCTOBER SEMINAR SET FOR  
TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER PROGRAM

A seminar on "Biological Receptors," to be sponsored by the School of Medicine's Technology Transfer Program, will be held Oct. 15 in the Hiebert Lounge. The daylong symposium will feature presentations on current research projects by BUSM professors from various departments. The Technology Transfer Program, one of the first such programs begun by a medical school, allows representatives from industries to become familiar with, and stay current with, the results of the School's more than \$33-million annual research efforts.

AAMC STUDY: MEDICAL STUDENTS'  
INDEBTEDNESS INCREASING

According to the Sept. 6 "President's Weekly Activities Report" of the Association of American Medical Colleges, the average medical school debt of respondents to the AAMC's 1984 Graduation Questionnaire was more than \$25,300. This figure represents a more than 11-percent increase over the \$22,700 figure for 1983.

Nearly 32 percent of the respondents reported a total educational debt, including pre-medical school, of \$30,000 and up, versus 25 percent in 1983. The 10,547 medical school seniors who responded to the questionnaire represented 63.6 percent of that class.

This year's results also show internal medicine and family practice to be primary choices for areas of specialization. Approximately 24 percent of the respondents expressed an interest in a research-related career as their first career choice.

BUSM FACULTY TO BE  
FEATURED AT CME COURSE

"Recent Advances in Management of Infectious Diseases in Children," sponsored by the Department of Pediatrics and the Division of Pediatric Infectious Diseases, will be held Dec. 27 to 29 at Buena Vista Palace at Disney World, Lake Buena Vista, Fla. This course is designed to expose pediatricians to recent advances in the diagnosis and management of common infectious diseases in children. Jerome O. Klein, M.D., a professor of pediatrics, is course director.



BRIEFLY NOTED

Linda Taylor, Ph.D., an assistant research professor of biochemistry, was one of 15 investigators to receive funds this year from the American Federation for Aging Research to conduct research on the aging process and age-related diseases and disorders. Taylor was awarded \$19,704 to study "Changes in Endothelial Cell Prostacyclin Syntheses with Age"....Marlene Oscar Berman, Ph.D., a professor of neurology and psychiatry, recently was awarded funds from the Veterans Administration to study the behavioral effects of long-term chronic abuse of alcohol. This grant will support Berman's ongoing research program entitled "Neuropsychology of Perceptual and Cognitive Functions"....Thomas Ryan, M.D., a professor of medicine and chief of the Section of Cardiology at UH, was among a panel of scientists who discussed recent trial results at a workshop on "Coronary Artery Bypass Graft Surgery," sponsored by the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute in Bethesda, Md., in September. Ryan and his colleagues presented the design and results of the Coronary Artery Surgery Study conducted at UH and 14 other hospitals over a 10-year period....At a National Center for Health Statistics workshop in July, Babette-Ann Stanton, Ph.D., acting director of the Department of Behavioral Epidemiology and an assistant research professor of medicine and psychiatry, participated in workgroups on "Monitoring and Epidemiological Investigations" and "Demographic-Specific Target Populations." The workgroups were part of a two-day "Quality of Life and Well-Being Workshop."

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## News & Notes

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